



# Global Politics

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The purpose of the Global Politics Update is to provide teachers and their students with contemporary examples which can be applied to the relevant key knowledge points from Areas of Study 1 of the VCE Unit 3 Global Politics Study Design.

## Unit 3, Area of Study 1

### Global Actors

At the heart of global politics is the power of the nation state, and the ability of the government of each nation state to act independently. State sovereignty as a concept upholds that no nation state had the right to interfere in the internal affairs of another independent nation state. This was largely upheld in international law during much of the twentieth century, although there were always challenges such as border disputes and intervention by other countries in civil wars or civil conflict.

However, with increasing power being given to international groupings such as the United Nations (UN), state sovereignty is no longer inviolable. Indeed, in recent years, there has been a move towards the strengthening of the power of international institutions such as the UN.

As well as political challenges to state sovereignty, and legal changes in the application of international law, sovereignty is challenged by multilateralism, public opinion and also globalisation.

The governments of many nations are eager to act multilaterally as part of world or regional groupings with many publically highlighting the concept of being seen as 'good international citizens'. A large part of this is affected by public opinion which is more important than ever before with the vast majority of countries in the world now having elected governments which are keen to reflect the wishes of their citizens. With growing awareness of environmental problems, this has also seen more governments seeking to deal with these challenges.

Globalisation has continued to see major flows in labour, capital, goods, services, and ideas around the world. This was already taking place before the use of the internet for trade, but rapidly accelerating use of the internet for buying and selling goods and services online, as well as access to news and ideas from around the world, has massively accelerated globalisation.

### Regional Groupings

As well as organizations such as the United Nations which operates throughout the world, there has been the emergence of regional groupings which have brought together countries in a particular region. Many of these were conceived for economic reasons, but have gradually come to assume political power.

#### The European Union

This initially brought together a small number of European countries to form an economic union, and until 1993, was called the European Economic Community (EEC) – or colloquially often as the 'Common Market'. The initial idea was to remove trade barriers between member nations, and allow for a free flow of labour, capital (money/investment), goods and services. Many of the countries were also members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and hence there were also military ties between them within a totally separate framework.



With direct elections to the European Parliament from 1979, and the increasing importance of the European Court of Justice, the EEC gradually assumed a political role as well as an economic one, and this saw it being renamed the European Union (EU). Economic ties increased considerably with the introduction of the Euro as a currency in 2002 although not all EU countries use the new currency. The EU has also ensured that member countries are closely tied politically as well as economically. The EU has stated viewpoints on major disputes around the world such as in Libya, and more recently in Syria on which it has placed a trade embargo.

The political role of the EU can also be seen by the fact that it was awarded the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize for having 'contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe'. Although international organizations have been recipients of the Nobel Prize, the EU is the first regional organization to receive the award.

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Through 2012 the European Union has had to deal with ongoing financial problems. One particular issue has been the Italian government which has been run by academic economist, Mario Monti, who was appointed as Prime Minister in November 2011 to try to solve some of the financial problems facing the country. Elections are scheduled in Italy on 24-25 February 2013 and Mr Monti warns that 'the risk is that Italy will end up with a party that could increase the risk of a new economic downturn'.

## ASEAN

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations initially brought together the anti-Communist countries in Southeast Asia to form a trade bloc, but the organization started to take on a political role after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978-79.



Although participation in the ASEAN Summit has always been at the forefront of membership of ASEAN, since February 2009 there have been two summit meetings a year in which the leaders of all the members of ASEAN meet for two or three days to discuss regional problems.

And as well as the leaders of ten member states of ASEAN (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam), and two observers (Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea), those of many other countries also meet as leaders of the ASEAN Regional Forum also come to the summit. These include Australia, China, the European Union, Russia and the United States.

The result has been that ASEAN summit meetings bring together most of the important world leaders and focus attention on Southeast Asia, issues involving Southeast Asia, and often the country which is hosting the meeting. This latter issue saw the 12th Summit Meeting being held in the Philippines after pressure was brought by the United States and the European Union not to hold it in Myanmar, which at that time was still an international pariah, heavily criticised for its lack of human rights.

The 21st ASEAN Summit Meeting, held in Cambodia in November 2012 saw US President Barack Obama being highly critical of human rights abuses by the Cambodian government of Hun Sen and its persecution of the opposition in the run-up to the July 2013 elections in Cambodia. Obama urged for Hun Sen to be more tolerant of opposition and, in particular, to allow the opposition leader Sam Rainsy to return to the country without the threat of imprisonment.

On 24 February 2013 Sam Rainsy issued a public statement highlighting the absence of foreign observers at the elections

scheduled for 28 July 2013, and urged for the UN to put pressure on Cambodia to implement free elections as it was clear that ASEAN was not going to be the forum for this.

## Contested and Changing Borders

There have been numerous border disputes around the world in which one nation state has challenged the location of a border. Traditionally through history, many of these disputes have reflected themselves in war. However, this has been less common since the 1990s, although there are many cases of fighting stopping short of war; or threats of conflict.

### Example 1 Dispute in the South China Sea

Over recent years there have been a number of disputes over islands in the South China Sea. This has become complicated not only through the disputes over the islands themselves, but also over the waters around them, especially as there are, or are believed to be, commercially exploitable resources there.

The dispute over the ownership of one series of islands (known to the Japanese as Senkaku Islands and the Chinese as Diaoyu) resurfaced in September 2012 when the Japanese government purchased three of the disputed islands from a private owner. This led to protests from the Chinese government, and also street protests in China against the actions of the Japanese.

The Japanese argue that the islands are Japanese and hence that there is no territorial dispute. They cite historical evidence with the islands administered by the United States from 1945 until 1972, and from the Japanese from then. The Chinese, in contrast, cite different historical evidence and that their government has long protested Japanese claims.

Disputes over other islands also involve conflicting claims from the Philippines, Brunei and other countries. Cambodia, as Chairman of ASEAN, has supported the Chinese positions and claims, and in the 2012 summit meeting it diverted ASEAN from discussing the claims of the Philippines even though that country is a member of ASEAN. With the chairmanship of ASEAN passing to Laos, it is expected that a pro-Chinese stance will be maintained.

### Example 2 The Preah Vihear Temple dispute (between Thailand and Cambodia)

The famous medieval Preah Vihear Temple lies on the border of Thailand and Cambodia. Although the International Court of Justice in 1962 upheld that the temple belongs to Cambodia, the issue arose again when, in 2008, there was a move for the temple to gain World Heritage status by UNESCO. This saw the issue raised by the Thai opposition and there was a military clash in October 2008, and then there were artillery duels between soldiers from the two countries as the issue became used by Thai and Cambodian politicians in their respective election campaigns.

In 2011, the International Court of Justice ordered that both countries withdraw their military from the region, and also restrict access to their police. Although there is no longer any fighting along the Thai-Cambodian border, there are concerns that the incident might be used in the July 2013 Cambodian elections as it was in the 2011 elections in Thailand.

**Example 3**

**The Svay Rieng Border Dispute (nominally between Cambodia and Vietnam)**

There has long been tension along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border with regular accusations by Cambodian nationalist politicians that Vietnam is encroaching on Cambodian territory.

In October 2009 the Cambodian opposition leader, Sam Rainsy, was invited to the border region after complaints from local Cambodian villagers that Vietnamese had moved their border posts, and thereby 'stolen' some Cambodian land. Sam Rainsy, and others, then moved the border markings back to their original location amid much press coverage.

Sam Rainsy was then charged with racial incitement and destruction of property. As the Cambodian parliament met to remove his parliamentary immunity, he fled the country and was subsequently charged with a range of offences and sentenced to 11 years in jail in absentia. Much of this focused on the claim, upheld by the court, that he published a 'false map' of the border region, even though the map he used was based on a US map of the border region. The Vietnamese government has not publically intervened in the dispute, regarding it as an internal Cambodian matter.

It is a particularly interesting case as it was a relatively minor border dispute which has been used by the Cambodian government (without any public involvement by the Vietnamese government) to initiate a court case which forced the opposition leader to flee the country. In spite of requests by US President, Barack Obama, the Cambodian Prime Minister, Hun Sen, has refused to allow Sam Rainsy to return to the country without the threat of jailing him.

**Institutions of Global Governance**

There are a range of global institutions, but the Global Politics Study Design requires students to focus on the following four:

1. The United Nations;
2. The International Monetary Fund;
3. The World Trade Organization; and
4. The International Criminal Court.

The **United Nations** remains the best-known and potentially the most powerful global institution. At its most formidable, it does have the right to give authority for fighting a war. This is not common, but it has exercised this power in the Korean War (1950-53) and also gave the mandate which resulted in the Gulf War (1991).

More commonly, the United Nations has imposed mandatory sanctions on recalcitrant countries. Recent examples have included an embargo on the sale of some items to North Korea and Iran, with massive and damaging sanctions maintained against South Africa from the 1960s through to the late 1980s, and against Iraq from 1990 until after the US invasion in 2003. These sanctions obviously not only affect the countries on which they have been applied, but also to trading partners of that country.

In areas of civil strife, the United Nations has been involved in sending in peacekeeping forces. It currently has missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Libya, Morocco, and Sudan/South Sudan – all in Africa; along the India-Pakistan border, in Afghanistan, in Lebanon, in the Golan Heights (Syria/Israel), in Cyprus and Kosovo, and in Haiti. Its mission to East Timor ended in 2012.

On a different level, many agencies and programmes of the United

Nations have assisted cooperation in a wide range of areas. These include:

- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF);
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and
- World Health Organization.

The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** was established in 1944, coming into force in the following year. It initially operated, in part, to stabilise exchange rates, but its role has changed. It now states that it 'is an organization of 188 countries, working to foster global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world.'

The IMF raises its funds from member countries which then have a number of votes roughly in line with this contribution.

If a country is in a dire economic plight and needs help from the IMF, initially the IMF provides policy advice and draws up plans for countries to recover economically. If needed, the IMF then loans money or lines of credit to these countries to enable them to follow IMF management plans.



The advantages in a country seeking help from the IMF are obvious, as the money loaned to that country is charged a relatively low interest rate. However, many countries have been unhappy with the demands that the IMF makes within its recovery plans for countries. This is often seen as interfering in the national sovereignty of countries as it might involve the country being forced to abandon projects which governments might see as adding to their country's prestige (e.g. having its own airline). The IMF also often recommends privatisation programmes which involve selling government-held companies and assets.

In 2012-13, there have been many demonstrations in Greece over the IMF-supported programme to improve the Greek economy by introducing a range of austerity measures. Although the austerity programme was agreed to by the Greek government, political problems in Greece during 2012 caused the programme to run 'considerably off track' (according to the IMF). They had planned for some structural changes, fiscal reforms and also an extensive privatisation schedule.

In January 2013, the IMF reported that in the previous few months, Greece had made 'impressive progress under the new coalition government in terms of restoring fiscal sustainability and agreeing to labor market reforms'. This, the IMF hope, will reduce Greece's public debt to below 110% of GDP by 2022. It is currently standing at 165% (2011 estimate) – as against the United States (105%),

the United Kingdom (86.8%) and Australia (30.3%). Greece remains the largest borrower from the IMF during 2012, followed by Portugal and Ireland.

However with Greece in its sixth year of recession, it has unemployment running at 27% (as against the United States at 7.9%, the United Kingdom at 7.7% and Australia at 5.4%). This has seen the departure of many young people from Greece in search of work elsewhere in the European Union, and further afield. This is also a problem facing Spain (also a member of the EU) which has an unemployment rate of 26%.

The IMF involvement in Greece, and also its aid to other countries in the EU, has helped restore confidence to the Euro, with it continuing to fluctuate within a smaller band against the US dollar, but continuing to fall against the Yen. There are now fewer and fewer economists and analysts who feel that Greece, or other EU countries, might drop out of the Euro zone.

The **World Trade Organization (WTO)** has the role of liberalising the international trade environment. This involves reducing tariffs (taxes on imports), quotas (limits on particular imports), and non-tariff barriers (other methods used by countries to reduce imports such as protection provided to domestic import competing businesses).

The economic basis of the WTO is that it is more advantageous and efficient for free trade to occur. With an absence of protection, goods and services can flow freely around the world and countries can specialise in the production of goods and services in which they have a competitive advantage. This encourages the greatest and most efficient global production of goods or services.



Although there are obvious economic arguments for free trade, some countries impose barriers for a variety of reasons and see the WTO as interfering in the rights of countries to allow or prevent imports of particular goods and services. For example, Australia protects its local film and television industry via local content rules, which effectively limits the number of foreign (mainly US) programs from entering the domestic market. It is argued that this is less about protection of jobs and production, and more about the maintenance of Australia's cultural identity.

Other objections come on the grounds of geo-politics. Many countries try to ensure that they are self-reliant in major strategic industries. This includes the arms industry with most industrialised

countries wanting to be self-reliant. A number of other countries, such as Japan, also have restrictions to protect their agricultural sector. There are also regulations and restrictions such as those imposed by Australia on farm produce because of the worry about importing agricultural diseases.

The most obvious objection to free trade is from countries where the cost of manufacture (generally through wages) is higher than in other countries. There is thus a concern in many industrialised countries that third world countries with low wages and cheaper labour costs can easily undercut their own workforce. Some governments argue that removing all import restrictions will most likely result in unemployment in their countries.

With the emergence of regional groupings (see above), organisations such as the European Union allow free trade between member nations, but have major barriers to reduce imports from non-member nations. These are sometimes referred to as trading blocs.

The **International Criminal Court (ICC)** started with the Rome Statute in 2002 when it was ratified by sixty countries. It operates a permanent tribunal to 'help end impunity for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community'. The impetus came from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia with the need for a permanent tribunal not just one which is established for a particular conflict.

Altogether 121 nation states have become parties to the Statute of the Court, with three countries (Israel, Sudan and the United States) stating that they no longer intend to be party to the ICC, and hence no longer have legal obligations that might have emerged from their previous signing of the Statute.

The ICC can indict and try people even if they have not broken any laws within their country. This is often because these people might have been government figures. As the ICC gains more and more acceptance, it shows the gradual supremacy of international law over the law of individual countries.

## Non-State Actors

This area of study also includes two non-state actors from two of the five categories:

1. human rights organisations;
2. environmental organisations;
3. organised religions;
4. global terrorist movements; and
5. organised crime syndicates

### Human Rights Organisations

There are a range of human rights organisations. One of the largest of these is Human Rights Watch which was established in 1978. Operating from its headquarters in New York, it has been involved in monitoring the levels of human rights around the world. Within it are groups such as Asia Watch, Africa Watch and Middle East Watch.

Another well-known human rights organisation is Amnesty International. This was founded in 1961 and operates from the United Kingdom with its task being 'to conduct research and generate action to prevent and end grave abuses of human rights, and to demand justice for those whose rights have been violated.'

Amnesty International has continued to highlight a large range of different issues in January and early February 2013. In the Asia-Pacific Region, it has been critical of the use of capital punishment in Japan following the return to the prime ministership of Shinzo Abe, whose previous term in office in 2006-07 had seen the execution of ten people, the highest rate under any leader of the Liberal Democratic Party which has ruled Japan for most of the period since 1955.

Human rights groups have also been able to take comfort by the move towards democracy in Myanmar which has seen the release of many political prisoners. Many of these were freed following the historic visit of Barack Obama to the country, the first by a sitting US president to Myanmar/Burma. Obama publically stated that his visit was an 'acknowledgement of the progress made towards democratization.'

### **Environmental Organisations**

Some of the older environmental organisations were established to protect fauna and flora. These include the World Wide Fund for Nature and Greenpeace.

In recent years there have been a number of new organisations which have been established specifically after recent interest in climate change and global warming.



While many organisations work alongside governments, Greenpeace and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (SSCS) have been involved in campaigns against policies by a number of governments around the world. For SSCS, it has been involved in a long and sustained battle against Japanese whaling. Financed by supporters around the world, it has focused much attention in Australia and other countries on the actions of Japanese whalers, and has led to a major reduction in whaling. The Japanese government has long protested the actions of Sea Shepherd which some right-wing Japanese groups have denounced as 'piracy'.

### **Organised Religions**

Religious groups have long been involved in political developments across national borders. The Papacy has long been a major player in European and later world politics, and remains a temporal power (running the Vatican City) as well as religious power in spite of Josef Stalin's famous comment 'How many legions does the Pope have' (1935). Although the Roman Catholic Church has long had a major influence in world politics, Pope John Paul II increased and enhanced the power of the Papacy, urging for policies against artificial birth control, homosexuality and gay marriage.

Evangelical Christian churches in the United States have been influential in policy-forming circles during many recent periods of US history, largely in supporting and financing, or attacking particular political candidates both in the United States and also overseas. Similarly, Muslim religious leaders have been heavily involved in politics in the Middle East and many other parts of the world. They have supported and opposed a range of political and social causes.

The 2012 US presidential elections focused much attention on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) on account of Mitt Romney being a prominent Mormon. Although the Mormon Church is active throughout the world, their main political influence has been in the United States, especially in the state of Utah (where they make up some 63% of the population).

### **Global Terrorist Movements**

Although there have long been terrorist organisations operating in particular areas in the world, globalisation has led to some groups establishing links around the world. In addition there are a number of groups such as al-Qaeda which have political aims on a global scale, and which has members, adherents and supporters around the world. For al-Qaeda, it has been particularly active in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and obviously has been involved in attacks or attempted attacks around the world.

### **Organised Crime Syndicates**

The mafia and other crime groups operated across national boundaries for long periods of time, but globalisation has assisted crime syndicates to operate more easily throughout the world. Drug syndicates from Southeast Asia and South America have been heavily involved in smuggling around the world, especially to western countries, with money being laundered in many other countries.

As well as dealing in contraband, there has been the emergence of cyber-crime with criminals in one country being able to defraud people in other countries. This has proven difficult for law enforcement countries with problems over international jurisdiction as criminals often deliberately operated from countries with weak legal systems.

The economic and political power of Transnational Corporations Transnational Corporations, although they have headquarters in a particular country, operate in a large number of countries. The term 'multinational corporation' was originally used to describe a company which operated overseas through foreign subsidiaries. Transnational Corporations, by contrast, are said to think more globally with senior executives from around the world, although the terms are often regarded as interchangeable.

The power of these companies is enormous as they have large incomes, workforces, assets and resources. Some of them are also actively involved in politics either through political donations, or through supporting or opposing particular government policies.

Some companies such as Halliburton have been highlighted by the media on account of their close contacts with particular politicians – in the case of Halliburton with former US Vice President Dick Cheney. And several arms companies have been accused of involvement in machinations in some African and South American countries.

As some of these transnational corporations have vast resources, their ability to influence political events, especially in poorer countries, has been highlighted as an obvious challenge to national sovereignty.

## Transnational Corporations

There has been pressure for various companies to adhere to what is known as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This has seen the United National Human Rights Council on 11 June 2011 endorse what was called 'Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights'. This sought to establish norms by which transnational corporations should deal with the issue of human rights both in countries where they operate, and also specifically in factories or sites where they employ workers, either directly or through subcontractors. Gradually it is expected that more and more transnational corporations will adhere to the principles which remain the first corporate human rights responsibility initiative which has been endorsed by the UN. This has led to some countries trying to enshrine it in their law with the Indian Lok Sabha (the Lower House of Parliament) on 18 December 2012 passing the Companies Bill 2012, which introduces the notion of Corporate Social Responsibility. ASEAN is also seeing to include some regulations in 2015.

## Review Questions

1. Define sovereignty as it relates to the study of international relations. [2 marks /2011\*]
2. Providing an example, explain one way in which state sovereignty can be challenged. [4 marks / 2012]
3. As well as nation states, what other form of global actors are there in international relations? Give an example of each category.
4. Give an example of a border dispute. State the country/ countries involved, and what is disputed.
5. Name one United Nations agency and explain its role. [3 marks / 2011\*]
6. Identify one objective of the World Bank. [1 mark /2011\*]
7. Explain one way the United Nations has promoted internationalism.[4 marks / 2011\*]
8. Choose one of the following key global organisations and explain how it has responded to one key global issue since 2000.
  - i. World Bank
  - ii. World Trade Organization
  - iii. International Monetary Fund [10 marks / 2011\*]
- 9a. State one objective of the International Monetary Fund (IMF); and
- 9b. State one example of an action taken by this body.[1 mark x 2/ 2012]
10. Describe one of the roles of the International Criminal Court (ICC). [3 marks / 2012]
11. Discuss how the political power of transnational corporations (TNCs) can be influenced by trade. [6 marks /2012]
12. Describe how state sovereignty could be challenged by regional groupings. [3 marks / Sample Paper]
13. Briefly explain the economic power and influence of one transnational corporation (TNC) [4 marks / Sample Paper]
14. Outline how the global community is increasingly viewing the CSR obligations of transnational corporations and examine the implications for human rights.

*Note: 2011 questions refer to a different study design*

## Application Exercise:



### UN Security Council

1. Name the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. These are marked on the map in blue.
2. What special voting rights do these have? Give a recent example when one of these countries has used this power.
3. How many non-permanent members of the UN Security Council are there? These are marked on the map in green.
4. Can you name any of the non-permanent members of the UN Security Council?
5. Before this term, how many times terms has Australia been a member of the Security Council?
6. What is the other main body of the United Nations where every country can be represented.
7. What is the more recent country to have its independence recognised by the United Nations.

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